

to promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which
there in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church;
provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

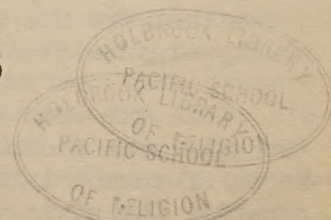
Published by The Christian Rural Fellowship, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.

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January, 1951

RURAL COMMUNITY IDEALS

By Joseph Ackerman*



Are you proud of your community? Do you tell others about its good points? Could you have a better place in which to live if you and your neighbors planned and worked together in solving some of your community problems? You have a chance to play a part in a great drama which may lead others to govern themselves in a way which will serve the best interests of all. . . .

Rural living at its best is the ideal for which we are all striving. What are the things that are good about rural life? What are your ideals and aspirations for rural living? What do you want to see preserved at all costs? As you ask these questions there seems to be something about the very word "ideals" which causes you to raise your chin a bit and lift your eyes and your mind drifts back to your home and family, to your parents and grandparents, to a teacher who kept you after school to correct some fault, to a minister whose words have been comforting and encouraging, to the doctor who came in the night, to the beauty of a sunrise, to the inspiring words of men like Thomas Jefferson, to the thrill at the sight of our flag flying high against a blue sky. Now maybe you think I am being sentimental as I recall persons and places and things that have helped to develop our ideals, but there is always something sentimental about the things we want to preserve and pass on to others.

You may ask if the ideals of rural people differ from those of urban people. I believe you will discover the differences when you examine the things that make rural life so satisfying. The authors of a book entitled, Rural Roads to Security, described some of these satisfying values as follows:

"When a man is on the land he is near nature and takes a joy in beholding her marvelous work of producing the fruits by which man lives. . . . The man's character develops, expands, and matures with the plants and animals he tends so carefully, until he partakes of the natural wisdom that is characteristic of the people throughout the world who live close to the soil. Thought and meditation, to which the quiet, tranquil work on the land invites one, ripens judgments and broadens intellectual horizons so that one is not left at the mercy of every radical opinion. . . . The man on the land is a man of serious thought and deep-seated

An address delivered at the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, Grand Rapids, Michigan, June 1950. Dr. Ackerman is Associate Director of The Farm Foundation, Chicago, Illinois.

convictions. Because he has such convictions, because truth, the principles and verities on which life is built really mean something to him, he is usually a man with genuine strength of character." *

There are ideals which pertain to the individual and to the family and home. But for a few minutes let us think together about the ideals which pertain to the role of the community in strengthening rural life. Your presence here makes me believe that you are a community leader. No doubt you have good team mates -- teachers, doctors, ministers, county agents, and representatives of the YMCA, the Boy Scouts, 4-H Clubs, the Farm Bureau, and many other organizations. How can you and your team help to preserve the best institutions in your community, to improve those that are not as good as they could be, and to fill in the gaps in your community organization?

The word "community" means much more than a group of people living in the same area under the same laws. It concerns the relationships of people, their sense of common interests, their sharing of work and play and friendship, their capacity for giving the glad hand in times of prosperity and the helping hand in times of distress or disaster. The interdependence of neighbors has always been an outstanding characteristic of persons who live in the country. This spirit of neighborliness seems to diminish in the city. Modern means of communication and mechanization seem to be reducing this interdependence of people in rural areas today. On the other hand, these same improvements are offering opportunities for many new relations. So I believe we would all agree that this sharing of friendship, this satisfying feeling of having and being good neighbors is one ideal we wish to keep alive in our rural communities.

It may not be so easy to find a point of agreement about some of your other rural community ideals. Values change as conditions change and as people change. Therefore, as we think of ideals it will be necessary to ask how the trends of the times are affecting rural life today. Increasingly the farmer is sending his children to town to school, going to church in town, shopping in the city, and becoming identified with the urban pattern of living. The old distinction between town and country does not exist to the extent it once did. This is an era in which the total community pattern includes both town and country. This means that Dr. Charles J. Galpin's idea, expressed about 1914, that the community of the future would be a "rurban" community, neither rural exclusively nor entirely urban but partaking of the nature of both, has become a reality. In this setting let us examine our community institutions and see if they are preserving and improving upon the ideals we cherish.

PRESERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

I believe we agree that we want to preserve and improve our natural resources. The soil is the basis for life. The way it is used or misused affects all phases of life. Our nation is blessed with rich natural resources, but we have not had the proper regard for the soil. We have mined it, eroded it, and abandoned it. We are not prepared to pass on to succeeding generations a soil which is enriched and able to sustain life more abundantly. Dr. Liberty Hyde Bailey reminded us that "if God created the earth, so is the earth hallowed; and if it is hallowed, so must we deal with it devotedly and with care that we do not

* L. G. Ligutti and J. C. Rawe, Rural Roads to Security (Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Co., 1940), page 300.

despoil it, and mindful of our relations to all beings that live on it." * I need not elaborate on this point further because I believe you often think seriously of the value of your natural resources. May I suggest, however, that you keep yourself informed about the local, state, and national agencies that are eager to help with conservation and resolve daily to give those agencies the benefit of your best thinking and cooperation.

EDUCATION

American tradition has always held that all people should have a chance at a well-rounded education. The quality of education provided the children of rural America should be a matter of national interest. Each year several thousand young persons educated in rural schools migrate to cities to find work, and it is important that rural youth receive an opportunity for education that will prepare them for either rural or urban living. While the basic training in the three R's may still be considered fundamental, I believe we would all like to see more emphasis on the development of the individual. The school should not merely give information but should stress the development of those abilities that will enable children and young people and adults to meet satisfactorily the major responsibilities of life.

The early training of each child is an important responsibility of every parent. In addition to love and physical care, children can be given many opportunities to learn by participation in specific chores which are always present on the farm. When a child learns how to work, when he learns how to use his time efficiently in completing the task at hand, he has learned a valuable lesson. He develops work skills and proper attitudes toward work and play, and he gains something of self-reliance and a certain sense of security that is highly important to the development of his character.

Education in the country has been traditionally associated with the little red schoolhouse. But is this not one tradition which we would all be glad to leave to the field of memories when we think of the advantages of the centralized or consolidated school? Figures indicate that there are still many one- and two-teacher schools in this country, and we must consider their problems as well as those of our community schools. Many books have been written about these changing educational problems, and it is impossible in these few minutes to do more than ask if you are giving your schools the thought and attention they deserve. Are you doing anything to help improve the schools in your community or are you leaving that up to the school board or the superintendent or the state board of education or the U. S. Department of Education? Of course all of these agencies and many others are concerned with the improvement of the schools, but they often need some prodding from you. You will receive many suggestions upon which you can act, if you but listen to the criticisms and remarks the children bring home from school, if you observe the progress of neighboring schools, and if you will stop to take an occasional inventory of your school buildings, grounds and equipment, your teachers, the curriculum, and the relationship of your school to your community.

Of course the teacher is the most potent single factor for better schools. Rural schools have had more than their share of emergency teachers. Certification laws seem to approve lesser qualified teachers for rural schools. Won't you go

* Liberty Hyde Bailey, The Holy Earth (reprint, New York, The Christian Rural Fellowship, 1943), page 11.

home from this meeting and do all you can to provide better working and living conditions, increased social recognition, and better salaries which will attract better teaching personnel for your schools?

You may say that perhaps you can do something about some of these things but when it comes to the curriculum or the courses taught in your school, that is out of your field. Have you ever actually looked at the list of courses offered in your school? If it does not include an opportunity for adults and children to learn how to retain the top soil on the land, how to raise and market the right crops, and how to know and understand our cities, our country, and the place of our country in world affairs, then you can do something about it.

The library is an arm of education and its functions should be recognized when you are constructing or reconstructing the educational framework of your community. Do you have a county or village library, and do you use that library? Would a mobile unit help you to get more service from your library? Many of us do not take advantage of the storehouse of information in our libraries -- information on immediate farm and home problems, background reading to aid in understanding current social, economic, and governmental problems, as well as recreational reading. May I suggest that you include a visit to your library on your next trip to town?

You will notice that I would include the adults in this query about the opportunities of your school and your community. Technological advances in agriculture make it imperative that those who remain on the farm possess greater abilities than farmers have ever needed before. In the past a great deal of attention has been given to the improvement of the soil, the seed, and the bread, but I wonder if the improvement of the farmer himself has been neglected? And has the improvement of the farmer's wife been neglected? Modernization throughout the home offers the challenge to the farmer's wife to take advantage of a wealth of new learning and new activities which will enable her to be a better helpmate, homemaker, mother, and assistant in all phases of life in the home and in the community. This field of adult education may be the place where you can contribute most to better living in the country. Your county agent and extension workers will be glad to help with your plans to improve the adult educational opportunities in your community.

THE CHURCH

The church occupies an important place in rural life, and around its teachings we have builded many ideals which I am sure we would preserve. In addition to preserving these ideals, there is even need today to put some real work into preserving and improving our rural churches. A smaller proportion of rural people are reached today by rural churches than at any time in the past. Many rural churches have been abandoned, and others have very few members and poorly-trained and poorly-paid ministers. There are inadequate financial resources, buildings, and equipment. Many of them seem to be steeped in emotionalism and antagonistic or reactionary attitudes toward modern social customs and recreational activities. Perhaps more rural churches will need to follow the trend of the rural schools through some plan for constructive centralization whereby people of different neighborhoods and of different denominations can work together in a common effort and be better friends. What can you do to help your church? I have heard recently of several rural churches that have improved their financial resources through the purchase and management of a farm. Members and friends of the church have contributed time

and equipment, and the ladies have prepared a combination dinner for the men on the days they work together on the "church farm" at planting and harvesting time. Have you thought of forming a church committee to encourage and assist desirable young couples and deserving tenants to purchase farms in your community? Families who own their own farms will be better members of your church and your community than persons who have a temporary feeling. These suggestions are intended to set your mind to work to develop other ideas which will revitalize your church so that it may continue to take the lead in providing your community with spiritual, social, and recreational satisfactions.

HEALTH

There is another set of ideals pertaining to health. Some of the recent facts and figures about rural health in this country make me wonder if you and I are assuming our full responsibility for our community health. Most of you may feel that you are doing pretty well by those ideals when you assume your personal responsibilities for a balanced diet, immunizing inoculations, periodical check-ups with your doctor and dentist, proper care of minor cuts and bruises to guard against infection, and precautions against accidents. But have you given any thought to that astonishing fact that farm boys drafted for World War II were rejected for physical defects to a greater extent than boys in any other major occupational group, and again to the fact that maternal and infant death rates are considerably higher in rural areas than in our cities? The same is true of death rates from most communicable diseases, such as, diphtheria, whooping cough, and measles, and we all know that there are well-known measures to prevent these diseases today. It is deplorable that so many rural people suffer from malnutrition. A great deal has been said about the country being such a healthy place to live, but the above facts cause a difference of opinion on this point today.

I hope you are wondering right now what you can do to help improve the health facilities of your community. Let's look at your home community. Have you been in your local hospital lately? I do not mean as a patient. You need not wait until you are taken there or until you go there to visit someone. Just go and look around. You may be able to help build some new fire escapes, paint some chairs, sew curtains. Then look at your family doctor. Is he getting old? Is there a younger doctor you can call on when he is unable to answer your call? Do you know about scholarships and loan funds which are available to rural young men and women interested in medicine or nursing, on condition that they return after training to practice in rural areas for a set period of time? Is your health department taking the necessary steps to assure safe water and sanitary conditions in your area? What means does your community provide for the poor and the physically and mentally handicapped? Perhaps these few thoughts will help you to examine your community health needs. Would it help to have a small committee of citizens who would seek information to pass on to you, who would study the overall health needs of your area, and who could instigate and carry through necessary action to improve the health facilities in your community?

RECREATION

It has often been said that if you can discover how a person uses his leisure time you can judge what kind of a person he is. Many of our ideals stem from the satisfactions that come from wholesome play. Today's increasing mechanization of our farms means more time for play, which in turn means that we should give increased attention to a planned program of recreation and leisure-time ac-

tivities. Rural areas naturally offer many advantages for recreation, such as, open space for outdoor sports, opportunities for nature study, more space for pets and hobbies. But more attention needs to be given to planning for a better use of our spare time and better community and public recreational activities. Does your community offer the kind of recreational opportunities you desire for your entire family? If not, it is your duty and privilege to develop and improve them.

MOBILIZING NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

You can add to this list of community interests and ideals. Perhaps your community is presently concerned with better roads, rural electrification, the county fair, or handicrafts. But let us remember that community life is more than a list of projects in a given geographical area. A sound approach to community life cannot be made without recognizing that much depends upon your attitudes and your interest. No community is static — remaining the same year after year. It is constantly changing. Cooperative relationships among organizations and institutions and mutual understanding on the part of every citizen will help preserve and improve your ideals for your community. The sources from which a free society derives its strength are the "tributaries of individual effort." . . .

It is impossible to legislate a better life. The desire must come from within a man so he will utilize the resources at his command. The Roosevelt Country Life Commission Report says, "Everything resolves itself at the end into a question of personality. Society or government cannot do much for country life unless there is voluntary response in the personal ideals of those who live in the country. . . . It is often said that better rural institutions and more attractive homes and yards will necessarily follow an increase in profitableness of farming, but as a matter of fact, high ideals may be quite independent of income, although they cannot be realized without sufficient income to provide good support." *

The extent to which human resources of a community can be mobilized or put into readiness for action depends upon:

1. the need for their mobilization,
2. how well the need is understood by the people,
3. the amount of local leadership which has been or can be developed,
4. the methods or techniques used in arousing community consciousness or pride, and the determination to do a specific undertaking, and
5. the degree to which one works through the natural leaders and natural groups of people in the way they are used to working.

May I list some of the reasons why coordination of human resources is needed:

1. Nowadays too many special interest groups and programs hit at the rural family and often from different angles.
2. Programs and activities of numerous agencies and groups now tend to be specialized and often come from the top down, whereas local community-wide problems usually fall outside the scope of any one special interest group and go unattended.
3. Agencies and organizations need to reach more people, i.e.; all segments

* Report of the Commission on Country Life (New York, Sturgis and Walton Company, 1911), pages 144-145.

of the rural population. Often groups, such as, tenants, young people, those in isolated communities, and those of different nationalities, are left out of community programs.

4. In many places there is a duplication of program or efforts; also a duplication of duties for a selected, limited leadership which therefore means overwork.
5. A consciousness of the problems or needs should be developed, also ways for motivating local responsibility. Bringing people in on the program-making should produce more local leadership.
6. There is need for developing better relationships between various agencies and groups, between town and country.

The self-analysis idea for a community is very useful as a means for obtaining some basic facts and for motivating people. Any undertaking, to be effective, must be close to the people. Mobilization should not result merely in more organization but should be a means for getting something done. Many communities are over-organized today. There is great need for coordination. . . .

THE CHALLENGE

All of us need to be concerned with the ideals and attitudes of rural people, but no great improvement in rural living will come unless the people themselves set up ideals toward which to strive. It has been said that every created objective is the embodiment of a mental vision and that great deeds are the offspring of great ideas.

Practical ideals for rural living include goals in both the economic and social realm. They are developed in the home, by the school, by the church, and by many other community agencies. They encompass the problems of the local neighborhood and of foreign countries as well. Farmers and rural leaders who work with them need to be keenly aware of what is happening and what actions need to be taken in order to attain the best rural life. This takes insight, understanding, patience, persistence, cooperation, and a willingness to put forth effort. It also takes faith and hope which are developed through spiritual experiences.

Rural people have a splendid heritage. We must never slacken our efforts in developing the kind of world in which we want our children to live. The task is big, but it can be accomplished if we have the vision and the courage to transform our ideals into realities.

You may say that you would like to do more to help your community but you have so little time. Often you are too tired from the duties connected with your work. You cannot be expected to do something in every area I have mentioned, but each of you will have your special interests to which you can contribute as much time and thought as possible. Community development must start with your interest in other people, their values and goals. It is necessary for people to discuss their problems thoroughly, for the many interests of diverse groups must be considered and integrated into programs which will make the community a more satisfying place for all. It was Monsignor Ligutti who said, "A lot of little people in a lot of little places are doing a lot of little things that, when added together, reach to the very heavens itself."

Regardless of how good an idea one may have for a community project, little is achieved until the people of the community feel that it is theirs. There

is no more important step in community development than that of getting more people -- young and old, town and country, men and women -- to participate in defining needs and outlining plans. No one method of doing this assures success. Imagination, initiative, tact, and patience are required on the part of those in key positions, and that means you. No matter how small your contributions may seem, when put together with those of your neighbors, they will help to enrich the ideals which you would promote for yourself and for your community.

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